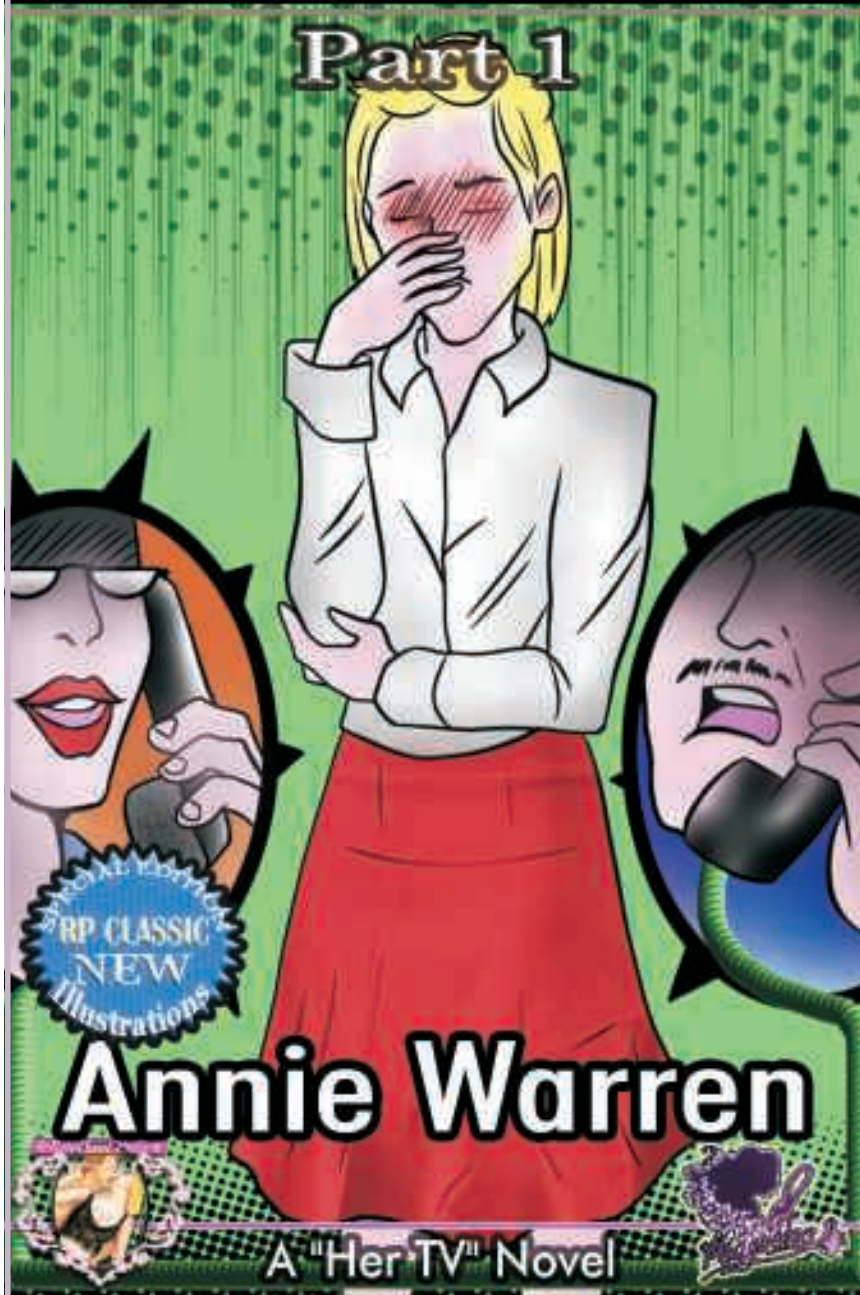


# Dress Code

Part 1



**Annie Warren**

A "Her TV" Novel

## **Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers**

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# DRESS CODE

By Annie Warren

## Chapter 1: The “Principal” Players.

To look at him, you’d never know, or even guess, at some of the storms that raged within Jason’s head. He was not all that headstrong. He managed to keep a lot of his thoughts to himself and in himself, below the surface of the calm, cool, seemingly always friendly expression that he forever showed the outer world. Well, almost always. There were occasions when it did show through. Rare occasions. On the other hand, what good would it do anyway? At five foot seven he was no towering giant, who could lord over someone else threatening him. No, he was actually rather short for a man. A fact that he had known since even before he stopped growing as a child. On top of that, he was handsome in a pretty, not a rugged sort of way. Added to this was the fact that his “handsome” face was framed, as it were, by his long, straight, sandy brown hair.

He was no slouch; however. He had well developed legs from jogging. They were belied somewhat since his upper body was sort of soft and resilient. He was

slender and lacked the muscular body of a pumper of iron, but was no real weakling either. So, what he may have lacked in physical prowess, he made up for with a quick and agile mind, along with nimble fingers, matched with a really excellent ear for music and its associated tonalities.

This does not necessarily mean that he was living by his music; actually, he was a programmer by trade, but he had musical talent and a reasonably excellent mind to go along with it.

I don't really have to tell you at this time, having set him up as it were, that Jason is going to be the principal player (in more ways than one) in this small drama of self-determination I am about to weave for you.

He is no man's man; still he definitely is a man!

The second principal player is Susan. She was about his size; but, was naturally curvier in all of the right locations, as you'd expect, or at least hope, a woman to be. In fact, she had an excellent figure and very long blonde hair that she usually wore loose, letting it flow down over her shoulders and then further down her back, more than halfway to her waist. Her deep blue eyes had a tendency to sparkle and twinkle when she and Jason were enjoying each other's company; as did his own blue-gray eyes under the same circumstances. She had also been into jogging and, as a result, also had well developed legs, only hers were more often on display under the flatteringly short skirts that she usually wore at work. She was a woman and proud of it; well, most of the time as we also shall see very shortly.

Susan had been a close friend of his since before college. She had met him in a high school orchestra in which they both played. She played oboe while he played violin. They were both very good at it; yet, for reasons known only to them, neither had decided to

make music a career. They still played. In fact both played in the city's excellent "municipal" orchestra.

To add to this "togetherness", they both worked not only in the same company; but, even in the same office as computer programmers. Now, since they were such good friends from so far back, you could well ask if they were married and, as the story begins to unfold both had thoughts of marriage at various times. Although such thoughts had passed and not been voiced, nor had they been forgotten. They weren't married, yet. Still they were definitely the very best of friends...

## **Chapter 2: Opening Scene, Troubled at Work**

Susan glanced up from the keyboard of her terminal and saw Jason staring intently at the screen of his with a frown showing his concentration.

He had apparently been scratching his head in puzzlement as his long, shoulder length hair was a bit disheveled. An odd state of affairs for a man who was usually very trim and tidy. Also, as an additional mark of his concentration, he had yet again loosened his tie and undone the top button of his dress shirt.

She knew that these were more unconscious moves for his comfort rather than from any puzzle, but the latter almost always brought on the former. She knew him and knew that he did not like suits and also that he particularly disliked ties: whether it be here on the job; or, was required for any of the orchestra's concert productions, even though then it was usually just a bow tie.

They shared a smallish office with two workstations, several file cabinets and some tables and chairs. It was not one of the "privileged" offices

with a window looking to the outer world, although both Susan and Jason had enough seniority that they could have requested and probably gotten one.

They were content to be free of distractions, though both had learned almost by heart the contents of several posters that were in the office. Sometimes when thinking through a problem, or assignment, they would stare at one or the other of the posters and analyze them superficially while their minds were going full tilt on the problem they were trying to solve or formulate.

Getting up from her terminal, she moved over to his desk and looked down at his terminal. The display seemed to be in order except several 'knots' of strange machine language characters.

Sensing her presence, he looked up and complained that the system had done him in again. She smiled, knowing it was probably true, and in further discussing the problem, found out what the problem was, and together they found a probable solution. Then, once he had found his answer, she asked him for a solution to a problem she was having and they hashed that one out too after moving to her terminal.

They helped each other like this quite often, being helpful rather than competitive.

Glancing at her watch, she announced that it was break time, and they moved off toward the break room where a pot of coffee and some snacks were available. Before leaving the relatively closed domain of their shared office to move into "company space", she reached over and buttoned his collar button. Then she tightened and adjusted his tie.

He made no move to either help or hinder her. Like I said, he did not like ties, nor the confines of the closed, tight collar.

Entering the break room, he went to the coffee machine and she went to get two donuts. As he poured them both cups of coffee, he muttered to himself for the nth time, "Dumb dress code!" and then walked over to the table they were to occupy.

"I know it's dumb, Jason, but we're stuck with it," she replied as if he had said it to her rather than just to have muttered it aloud. Getting some cream and sugar, she continued, "Somebody been threatening you again?"

They sat down at the small table.

He knew that no one else was there. He still looked around.

"Mister Bainbrook has been on my case again. I wore my jogging shoes to work by mistake, and he called me on it. God! You'd think that clothing was more important than what one is supposed to be able to do."

While saying this, he had waved his hand, lightly tapping his cup and spilling some coffee that barely missed his suit.

Bainbrook was their immediate supervisor. He was tall and slender with angular features and body, quite masculine in both shape and movement. He featured himself as a lady's man and walked a thin line between protocol and sexual harassment. He had ogled Susan often, but had always kept his distance. Nonetheless, she had never felt really safe from him. He had ridden Jason on many an occasion on his dress code violations. However, he did that to others in the office too and no overtones were taken.

He was always the image of the finely dressed executive with mirror polished shoes, immaculately pressed suit and seemingly always freshly starched shirt. Neat to excess, he still had a sort of slimy, weasel-like image that overlay his outward appearance.



His black hair was always neatly combed. Some argued that he must have had it plasticized to always be in order. He also had a thin mustache that was neatly trimmed and lay just above a perpetual smile; unless, he was harping on some infraction, when it could downturn to match the severest scowls. He was the company-man's company-man: a lackey to his superiors and a petty tyrant to his underlings.

This was Bainbrook, their supervisor.

“Well, you know the corporate mind or lack of it,” she replied, smiling at his exasperation. She remembered his often-mentioned aversion to formal wear from long before the time they had started work. She remembered that this aversion was so strong; that, when their high school orchestra had required him to wear a suit and tie for a performance, he had almost quit the orchestra in order to “protest” the requirement. At the end he had acquiesced, knuckled under and wore the required garments. Work-ing in this office had almost been as bad. Again he had knuckled under for the sake of the job.

Of all people, she knew that these roots went deep!

“Unless you figure a way to get around those rules, you just have to toe Bainbrook's mark; or, he, or someone else, will either stomp on that toe, or ship it somewhere else.”

She smiled at him adding, “Jogging shoe, or whatever!”

“Yeah, most of my toes have been flattened by now anyway, even the steel tipped ones.” He reached into his pocket and brought out a crumpled, folded piece of paper that had obviously been pocket furniture for a long time and had been handled/read many times over. He unfolded and read aloud from it; not that he had to, since he had almost memorized parts of it..

“Dress Code: Male employees will wear suits and ties. Suits will be a solid blue, black, brown or gray and will be conservative in both color and cut. Shoes will be black or dark brown. Socks will be dark in color, not clashing with the suit color. Slacks and sport coat in the above colors are allowed on occasion but not on a regular basis. Ties must be worn and will be conservative in style and color. Shirts will be white or pastel shades without adornment.”

“You know, Susan, I am almost surprised that they do not include a standard for my underwear. I bet they probably would if it could be routinely checked, or if it showed.”

“Oh, Jason, you know that it is all for your own good. ‘Neat people do neat work’ is one of the mottoes that they are constantly harping on. Of course, then there is Larry. He is always as neat as a pin. However, his work is really sloppy and messy. I had to do some maintenance on one of his programs, and it was a real task! You know the saying that ‘a messy desk shows a messy mind?’ Well his desk is always neat and empty. I can well guess why.”

“We both know that I could be neat without this stupid strangler on,” he said as he held the end of his tie high over his head like a hangman’s rope, sticking out his tongue in mock strangulation. “And besides, the rules are biased. Look what they say about women’s clothes.”

“Women employees will be well groomed and will wear dresses or skirt and blouse combinations. Jackets are optional. Departmental supervisors will wear suits with the same qualities as men’s; however, they must be with a skirt; pantsuits are not allowed. Skirt lengths will not be higher than three inches above the knee. Women will wear hose and high heeled shoes, minimum two inches.”

He looked up at her. "See? No mention of colors, or ties, other than a sideways remarks for supervisors. You always look good and comfortable."

Her eyes flashed a bit as she replied, "Well, women's clothes may be more comfortable. Yet, I'd like to be able to wear slacks, or flats, some time."

As she was saying this she picked nervously at the full skirt of her dress, rearranging it several times over.

He looked down and also noted her trim legs and her smart high heels. They looked good and he enjoyed seeing her in such good looking clothes.

"You look great just as you are, Susan. I'd miss seeing your great legs."

"Oh, you men are all alike! You grate at your dress code, yet sluff on mine. The code was made for us by men who want to perpetuate the male and female stereotype images. What you are chafing at is what I chafe at: the stereotype. Men could use liberation as much as the women could; only, they could use liberation from themselves!"

"Yeah, there doesn't seem to be any way to break the code," he said, nodding his head in agreement. "The exceptions are pretty tight. It says that, 'Exceptions to these codes are rarely granted unless the basis is medical, or from some disability.' Maybe, if I cut off my head, I can get out of wearing a tie."

They laughed and she put in, "or you could get an allergy to ties, or blue serge. No, that wouldn't do, you'd have to wear some other cloth. People do develop allergies to such things, you know."

"Yeah, I suppose, but, that's wishful thinking. You could ask Margie on that one."

Margie was not only their doctor. She was their friend. She had been interning when they were in

school and had worked in the school's student health service. When they graduated from the university; she had 'graduated' from her internship and had gone into private practice. They met her when he had a bad sprain and Susan had helped him by taking him to the university's student clinic. Their, random selection, so to say, had deemed that she be their doctor. Both of them were impressed by her as a person and as a doctor.

"You know, Jason, that's not all that bad of an idea. Maybe she could help."

"Oh sure. Still, people don't just suddenly develop allergies, especially specific allergies. Besides, the company doctor would also have to have the same finding, or else it wouldn't wash. Sounds awful slim to me."

"I suppose you're right, although the company Doc has been known to get pretty wishy-washy at times," was all she said, however she was thinking, asking herself if such things were possible. Maybe....

By now their break time was up and they went back to their respective desks. The casual conversation and gripe exchange was quickly forgotten by Jason as his mind turned to computing and programming, but it had gotten her thinking, and, before they left, she went to personnel and asked for a copy of the Dress Code and took it home with her that night.

She all ready had an appointment with Margie later that week anyway; so, why not see what she had to say after all?....

### **Chapter 3: An Idea Takes Shape**

Margie was a handsome woman, and, like Susan and Jason, was strong of both body and spirit. She was taller than Susan, which means she was also taller than Jason. She was quite businesslike in her

office even though they had also been friends for some time.

After satisfying her original needs, Susan outlined Jason's 'problem' along with some 'additions' of what she wanted plus some of the reasons why, not all of which were altruistic.

After hearing her out, Margie did a bit of "counseling" on some of those wants. She almost asked her why she had not asked Jason to marry her; but, stopped just short, sensing that this could well be a fruitless line to open up. It was strange to her that a woman would want a man with the qualities that Susan would want in Jason, very strange, though not unheard of.

As far as allergies and such were concerned, she said that there were some possibilities that she had heard of in some obscure research papers that she had happened to read not long ago while boning up on what was new in medicine. She would have to do a bit of researching on the topic. Besides, if she were to be able to do anything, he would have to grant her "carte blanche" to do whatever she felt was necessary. Without it, there would be no sense in even starting such a program.

Susan pondered Jason and their multiple conversations on the topic. She then said that she was fairly certain that he would do almost anything reasonable to get out of knuckling down to that code.

"I think he'd jump at any chance to get out of what he thinks is a combination straight jacket and choker. I'll ask him and give you a call."

With that, the appointment was at an end. However, more had begun than ended as Margie began reading and rereading the medical journals from the recent past, trying to recall the research she had read about fairly recently....

In talking with Jason the next day, Susan asked him and he said that if he could get out of suits and ties that he'd gladly give Margie a chance and that he'd do whatever she required of him.

So, Susan called Margie and set the next phase rolling — production of a set of proper release forms and serious research into allergies.

## **Chapter 4: Research Bears Strange Fruit.**

Two weeks later Margie called him; and, after telling him that she had found something in the literature that might help him out of his “trouble”, summarily gave him an (almost immediate) appointment to see her for further talk on that problem.

Jason then told Susan, but as much as she wanted to go along, she could not justify it. Work was not a school where you could just pick up and run off on your own time, maybe even cutting a class or two if the occasion warranted it. Sensing that Margie had a possible out for his detestation of suits, whatever that may be, he did as he was told and left the office telling Bainbrook that he had to see a doctor about an allergy that he seemed to be developing, and for which he had an appointment.

Bainbrook frowned a bit but let him go without any further questions.

Not knowing what Margie had in mind, Jason was a bit nervous when he entered her office.

To a degree, she was also nervous, since what she was to offer was experimental, at best. Most of medicine dealt with how to get rid of allergies, not how to induce them.

As he went to her visitor's chair, he looked at her.

She was as always, in her professional manner, neat as a pin, wearing the “eternal” (if not down right stereotypical) white coat with a stethoscope in one pocket. Her short hair was neat and framed an oval face crossed by a pair of steel rimmed glasses. Yes, she was all business even though they were good friends (outside of the office).

“Well, Jason, I hear you want a change of clothing.”

She looked into his file as he sat down across the desk from her.

Even as he sat, he removed his tie. The top button of his shirt had long since been undone so that the collar stood wide open without the tie loosely holding it together.

“That’s not too far from the truth, Margie. I detest suits and ties and all of the formal crap that goes along with them.”

She looked up, even mild invectives were not a normal part of his vocabulary. This was more than obviously a very sore point with him. She noted casually that his tie was off and his collar open. Even in that state he did not look totally comfortable with his suit making such variances incongruous. She took what looked like two forms out of his file and handed them to him.

“I can’t promise you any success in that line, Jason. Medicine is a great healer, though it can sometimes cause harm in the line of healing. That form has to be completed by you and signed before I can do anything.”

He was reading as she spoke so she spoke slowly.

“It is a standard... release form for... volunteers who submit to medical... experimentation. If you had... an allergy, then I would try... to cure you. That

would not be... experimental... treatment... Any questions?"

He read the lines of the standard form for what appeared to be a release of practically life and limb to her care. Then, on a separate page, not a part of *the* standard re-lease form, also set up with a signature block, were some added clauses that outlined the real purpose of it all — to get around the dress code of his current employer. He read it all through several times while Margie waited.

She, of course, knew what the forms contained and what they implied and requested.

"I see it more or less puts my body, if not my soul, on line in the interests of science as well as outlining, uh, perhaps too clearly(?), uh, the real reasons for my, uh, 'volunteering'. Is that part necessary?"

"If you want to give it a try, then it is *absolutely* necessary! Let's say it is just a back up to the signature on the basic form. Believe me, Jason, I'd gladly do what you are asking. There might be unknown side effects with repercussions that neither of us can foresee.

"I consulted Bill Parks, a friend of mine, who is a lawyer and my legal counselor. He set it up this way. I trust you, as I know you trust me, but without this instrument, I have been advised to do nothing. It all depends on how strongly you feel about this whole thing.

"Remember, I can promise you nothing, neither an inducement nor a cure afterwards should you want to stop anything that may be started. As the form says basically, you would become a volunteer, a human lab-animal in a field of experimentation that is considered non-life-threatening. It covers me for liability and you for volunteering."



“These clothes have become the bane of my existence, Margie.” So saying, he picked at his suit sleeve. “They interfere with my work and at the concerts I give. It is a pain for which there is no DIRECT cure. Even aspirin won’t touch that pain.”

He smiled at the weak joke and then continued, looking down at the forms in his hands.

“Maybe we can find an indirect one. I’ll sign it... uh... for science, of course.”

As he smiled at her and started to reach into his pocket for his pen, she stopped him to call in her nurse to witness the signature. He then took out his pen, signed and dated both forms.

The nurse signed as witness and left.

“And so to business. I’ve searched the literature and found some cases of induced topical sensitivities. Most of them are strictly lab type responses since there is no mention in the literature about anybody requesting an allergy before.”

She took up a sheaf of papers out of his file and leafed through them.

“I see that your last physical was three months ago. Hmmm. All is in order as far as I can see. Good health as all tests report. Have you had any changes since them? No broken bones I see.”

She smiled at him and he smiled back.

“Not really. I have this pain in my neck from my boss and also seemed have developed an allergic reaction to work, can we fix them?”

She laughed heartily, and he joined her in laughter in spite of himself. The seriousness of the signed and witnessed forms was behind them.

“I suspected that was what you were REALLY here for. Is that the excuse you gave to come and see me?”

“I told that idiot Bainbrook that I had an allergic reaction that I wanted checked out. I didn’t say to what. If I had told him what I really thought, and what the appointment was really for, they may have had an instant pink-slipped cure. Or a cure, involving the guys with the white suits, large nets and ‘rectilinear jackets’, that could be even more of a pain than this one. I like the job. It’s just that the environmental pests are a bit hard to take at times.”

“OK, let me look you over and we can start.”

They went to her examining table where he stripped down to the waist while she thumped, bumped and listened to his vitals. She then took his blood pressure, temperature and several blood samples and even a urine sample, a sort of instantaneous mini-physical.

“Now Jason, this will probably give you a period of real discomfort before you can get the final, and real, relief you requested, if that is indeed all that possible. I’ll have to give you some shots in your hips and an initial application of a cream you are to use every other day until it is all used up.

“In one article there was a chemical cited with a name as long as your arm with maybe a couple of hands thrown in too. For short they call it simply tri-pentaammoniate, the only place I’ve ever seen a double ‘i’ used. With tri and penta I’d guess it had 15 somethings, but haven’t analyzed the formula to see what they really are. It seems it set up an allergic reaction to whatever was mixed in it in powdered form.

“I’ve gotten a sample of it and taken and powdered some samples of the more common men’s clothing materials and added them to it. It should react within three days. Whether or not it does, I’ve set up an ap-

pointment for you in four days and we can check on what is going on. Meanwhile, take off your pants.”

“My pants? Why?”

“We shall start with the most common place for such allergies to break out, the legs and around the groin. When you apply it, be sure you do not get any on your genitalia or you could get REALLY uncomfortable. I think you know what I mean.”

He stripped off his pants and sat again on the table.

She reached for a pair of rubber gloves that she deftly drew on.

Jason assumed it was just standard operation and said nothing, nor asked anything, as she applied the paste-like material.

“See, just put it here on the inner thighs and at the crease just about where your shorts end. I’d suggest you wear boxer style shorts for comfort. Use briefs only if you suspect you will have to see their doctor. You will at some time, so maybe wear them to work, if you can stand it.”

She smeared some of the ointment on him, showing him where and how much.

“Now, roll over, I’ve got to give you a couple of shots.”

He complied as she got a syringe and a small vial with the standard rubber top that let needles in but nothing out. He glanced over at it. However, he could not see the label, being so distracted by the needle on the syringe as she quickly inserted it and extracted some of the contents, putting the vial down out of eye shot.

She gave him a shot his left hip and then repeated the process, giving him a second

shot in his right hip. "This will help it along and trigger the sensitivities."

"Was that necessary? What was it?"

"It is a steroid mixture that will set up your system to react. If you don't like shots,

we could alter the dosage method."

"You're the Doc, Margie, but if I had my drothers, I'd get away from the shots. I REALLY don't like them. Needles make me nervous."

"OK, get dressed. I've done my worst. Let's just hope that it is a worst that will work. And remember... you asked for it."

"Well, Margie, I feel funny already. I'd bet it is just the odd cream and the pain from the shots. Let's hope it works."

He picked up the small, unlabelled jar with the remains of the ointment.

"Once a day for two days? OK, let's give it a try. Give the first one tonight?"

"Yes. Put it on the areas that you want to react, say waist to almost knee. Just be careful about your groin. If you get it there, remember what I said; it will cause REAL misery. As soon as you get a reaction, be careful what you wear for when the reaction is full blown, it will spread to the body and not be localized where we first started it."

She smiled at him with a caring smile, and he smiled back.

With that the appointment was over and he left.

## Chapter 5: A Quiet Beginning

That night, he stripped naked and looked at where the ointment had been applied. There was nothing other than a slightly oily film in several areas not rubbed off by his shorts or pants. He had apparently absorbed most of it. Wiping a bit of the film off with a finger, he noted that it was almost fuzzy from some of the fibers that were remnants of what Margie had powdered, or almost powdered, and that hadn't been absorbed by the paste. Then, taking the jar, he applied a new coat, carefully avoiding his genitalia, moving up to his waist where the indent of his tight belt could just be seen. When he put on his pajamas, there was a slight adhesion to the ointment. Having done his "chore" he went to bed. As his mind drifted before sleep, he wondered to himself if he should have worn rubber gloves...

Next morning there was again only a light film to show that anything had been done. He dressed and went to work.

Susan was all questions.

However, he really had nothing to tell her and so they both wondered what, if anything would happen.

That evening he applied the ointment and looked for changes; there were none. In the morning he noticed the areas where the ointment had been applied were slightly pebbled, with lots of small raised bumps, almost like the skin had become rough. There was also a slight irritation, sort of like a mild chaffing. He noted it only in passing and went off to work. That night, it had increased a bit so that he now had no problem knowing where to put on the ointment. Despite the slight irritation, his sleep was restful.

By the next morning the rash was beginning to really take shape. Some of the small points he had noticed the night before were becoming red and in-

flamed. There was now a definite irritation and the beginnings of an itch. It was bad enough that he began to walk funny, favoring the sensitive skin.

At work, Susan noticed it at once and they had a discussion on discomfort.

He said it was not really bad, just uncomfortable.

As luck, good or bad, would have it, Bainbrook also saw him do his “altered” walk and asked him what was up.

Jason merely said he had a rash that his doctor had diagnosed as some sort of an allergic reaction. He added that he already had an appointment for the next day.

Bainbrook, however, being a boss type, told him to go and see the company doctor right away and then to report back with what the doctor had said.

So, before he had really wanted to, he went down to see the company doctor.

Their company doctor was actually more of a super medic; a part time doctor, with a separate practice, who came in for an office hour during the middle of the day to handle minor problems.

Jason explained his problem, well, the symptoms induced by the cream (without mentioning the cream, or the *real* problem), and the fact that he had been told to report to Bainbrook after his call, whatever the doctor said about the condition.

The doctor examined him briefly, saying that it did look like an allergic reaction. Still, he did nothing else since Jason had also told him of his appointment with Margie, that is, Doctor Benson. So he wrote out a note describing the results of his examination and gave it to Jason.